DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Resident Emergency Safety Check Policy and Procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to authorized provider staff when conducting Emergency Safety Checks to support the safety of residents in HSH funded supportive housing buildings.

Note: This policy is not applicable for scattered site supportive housing, navigation centers, or shelters.

This policy is accompanied by the Resident Emergency Safety Check Policy Notice ("Policy Notice") found in **Appendix A**. Authorized provider staff are to review the Policy Notice with all residents at move in and with current residents who reside in the building. Residents should sign the Policy Notice and be provided a copy of the Policy Notice. The signed copy of the Policy Notice must be maintained in the resident's files for both Property Management and Support Services.

Note: In cases of an emergency, staff are expected to act quickly, follow emergency protocols, and in instances when deemed necessary, conduct an Emergency Safety Check.

Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the terms:

- **Wellness Check** refers to outreach to residents who have not been seen or heard from in at least 3 days (recommended) or if there is reasonable concern by provider staff for the tenant's well-being.
- **Emergency Safety Check** refers to the entering of a resident's unit for a safety assessment when there is reason to believe the resident is at immediate and substantial risk due to a medical and/or psychiatric emergency.
- **Authorized provider staff** refers to staff that are permitted by Property Management to conduct Wellness Checks and / or Emergency Safety Checks.

Statement of Policy

Note: In the case of reasonable concern for a resident's welfare, it is permissible for Property Management staff and Support Services staff – at the discretion of Property Management – to enter the resident's room to perform an Emergency Safety Check, as per the protocol outlined below. This follows the California Civil Code 1954, which can be reviewed here: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=CIV&sectionNum=1954

I. Residents in supportive housing sites may experience a multitude of chronic medical, mental health, and substance use related illnesses. Management and acuity of a resident's conditions can exist on a continuum from very well managed to very poorly managed.

II. The role of Support Services staff includes being alert to changes to resident's conditions and intervening by alerting emergency medical services when indicated.

Wellness Checks

Typically, a Wellness Check, or series of Wellness Checks, will precede an Emergency Safety Check. If staff have not seen or heard a resident in at least three days (recommended); or, are concerned for the tenant's well-being; or, have received reasonable complaints about a resident, authorized provider staff may conduct a Wellness Check. Methods of conducting a Wellness Check include:

1. Calling the resident on the phone number the resident provides
2. Knocking on the resident's door. ***Note:*** *Wellness Checks do not permit entering a resident's unit, unless there are reasonable grounds to do so. In that instance an Emergency Safety Check would be conducted – see procedure below.*

If the Wellness Check does not end in contact with the resident and the resident is not seen or contacted by staff in the days immediately following the initial Wellness Check, staff should conduct a follow-up check within a recommended three business days. When authorization allows, support services staff should contact other service providers who have existing connections with the resident. Support Services staff should also attempt to verify the resident's whereabouts by contacting the local police, the city or county jail system, local hospitals, and the county morgue.

If contact or location of the resident is still not successful, Support Services staff will work with Property Management to determine if an Emergency Safety Check is necessary – see procedure below.

All Wellness Checks should be documented in the resident's files by authorized provider staff.

Emergency Safety Checks

Determining if an Emergency Safety Check is Necessary:
If the Wellness Check is not successful or it is determined that the resident is experiencing an emergency, an Emergency Safety Check may be necessary.

Authorized agency staff will determine that there is reasonable concern for the resident's welfare as evidenced by one or more of the following:

- Wellness Checks have been unsuccessful or have resulted in reasonable concern for the tenant's well-being.
- The resident is experiencing or is at-risk of a crisis, including:
  - The resident has been having acute health and/or mental health issues;
  - A neighbor, member of the person's support system, or other service provider expresses concern for the resident's immediate safety; and/or
  - There is concerning assessment data or reported information on the resident (such as, recent hospitalization but still in unstable condition, acute change in mental status, suicidality).
- The resident has not picked up mail or moved posted notices on the door for 3 days (recommended - or less if that is unusual for the resident).
- All efforts to locate the resident have been exhausted, including:
  - Confirming the resident is not currently being treated in inpatient care;
  - Contacting providers the resident was scheduled to see (if release is present);
  - Reviewing the sheriff's department webpage to see if the resident has been incarcerated; and/or
  - Contacting the resident's emergency contact to verify if resident has been seen/is safe.
- Property Management and/or Support Services staff has reason to believe that children are in danger, at-risk for harm, or have been abandoned.
- Property Management and/or Support Services staff has reason to believe that a disabled or elder adult is in danger, at-risk for immediate harm, and/or has been abandoned.
- If the resident has established a safety plan that includes Wellness Checks and has not responded according to the plan.

Conducting an Emergency Safety Check

Note – if at any time staff believe that emergency services (e.g. law enforcement, fire department, medical personnel) need to be contacted, they should do so.

Ideally two staff members will be present for an Emergency Safety Check – one from Support Services and one from Property Management. At least one staff member from the Property Management team must be present for any Emergency Safety Check to provide access to the unit. It is advisable that the resident's case manager, nursing staff, or other staff with whom the resident has a connection be present at the time of the Emergency Safety Check. *Only Property Management staff or emergency services (Police/Fire) are permitted to key the door for Emergency Safety Checks.*

Some preparation on what to expect, what to be ready for, and what should, or should not happen, should be discussed in advance. Staff conducting an Emergency Safety Check should follow agency policies around safety / Universal Precautions, bring gloves and it is recommended to make sure a cell phone or two-way radio is in possession.

Emergency Safety Check Procedure:

An authorized housing provider staff member will knock or ring the doorbell:

- If the resident responds and there does not appear to be in immediate crisis, no entry into the resident's unit is required. However, staff should explain the purpose of the visit. Staff who conducted the visit must document the visit in the resident's files.
- Once a reasonable time has elapsed, and there is no response from the resident, Property Management will announce themselves and state the purpose of their visit. Staff will wait a few minutes and if there is still no response, staff unlocks the unit door, and makes a respectful and courteous announcement stating the resident's name and purpose for the visit while at the threshold of the door.
- If no response is given, Property Management staff (ideally with Support Services) enter the unit.
- If the resident is present and conscious, staff state the purpose for the visit and reaffirm concern for the resident's welfare. If staff determine the resident is not in an immediate crisis, staff will review reasons for concern with resident and strategize proper interventions to ensure resident safety, if necessary.
- If the resident is present and unconscious or in a compromised health state, staff call emergency services immediately or as is appropriate. In this situation, support services and / or Property Management staff will handle the following:
  - Call 911, or direct other staff to make the call;
  - Staff should follow any agency specific policies and procedures on administering CPR or Narcan;
  - Ensure personal safety by giving an agitated resident space and/or keeping a clear distance from biohazardous substances;
  - Assist emergency personnel to locate the resident;
  - Remain on-site and available for emergency personnel until emergency personnel has left or the situation is stabilized;
  - Ensure no one moves the resident or their belongings; and that the door is secured.
  - Notify supervisor(s) as soon as possible
- If the resident appears to be deceased, staff should call 911 or the Coroner's Office immediately and not disturb the contents of the unit.
- If the resident is not visible upon entering the unit, staff should respectfully and cautiously look in places where an incapacitated or deceased resident might be, including: bathroom (including bath tub), closet, behind large furniture or objects in the room (space between the side of a bed and a nearby wall, for example), etc. If possible, none of the resident's items should be touched or moved.

- If the resident is confirmed as **not home**, the Property Management staff will leave a note indicating an Emergency Safety Check was performed and requesting the resident to make contact. In this situation, support services staff will handle the following:
    - Continue to attempt to make contact / follow up with additional Wellness Checks; and
    - Contact San Francisco hospitals, County Jails, and the Coroner's office to determine if the client is in their care.
    - The resident's unit should be secured by Property Management when the Emergency Safety Check is complete, including re-locking the door.

Documentation

Property Management and / or Support Services staff (whoever conducted the visit) will record the outcome of all Wellness Checks and Emergency Safety Checks per agency documentation standards within 24 hours or the first work day after the incident. The record will include:

1. Reason for Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check;
2. Date and Time of Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check;
3. Outcome of Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check, including clinical assessment and action; and
4. Plan for follow-up

If necessary, Critical Incident Report Forms should be completed and submitted to HSH per policy. Property Management may generate documentation/incident report per their agency policy.

Follow-Up

As noted above, if the Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check did not end in contact with the resident and the resident is not seen or contacted by staff in the days immediately following the initial Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check, staff should conduct a follow-up check within (recommended) three business days. Support Services staff should contact other service providers who have existing connections with the resident. If an Emergency Wellness Check did not end in contact with the resident, Support Services staff should also attempt to verify the resident's whereabouts by contacting the local police, the city or county jail system, local hospitals, the county morgue, and Support Services staff should communicate this with the HSH Program Manager

Following any Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check, the Support Services team and Property Management will coordinate any next steps within 1-2 business days of the check, if necessary.

Support services staff should outreach to and respond to the resident's questions or concerns regarding the Wellness Check or Emergency Safety Check. Outreach or follow-up might include encouraging the resident to complete or update emergency contact information or discussing how to avoid unnecessary wellness checks by regular communication with neighbors or staff.

Consent and Privacy

Consent is not required to perform an Emergency Safety Check, as by definition, all Emergency Safety Check are in the case of potential emergency as per California Civil Code 1954. All residents are informed of the Emergency Safety Check policy at move-in and provided the Resident Emergency Safety Check Policy form.

Wellness Checks and Emergency Safety Checks should always ensure a resident's privacy is respected and not violated. An Emergency Safety Check is not an opportunity to investigate a resident's unit or belongings.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Appendix A:
Resident Emergency Safety Check Policy Notice

Resident Name: _____ **Date:** _____
Building Name: _____ **Unit #:** _____

- You are living in a *supportive housing* site where we take measures to support the safety and wellbeing of all of the residents in the building. This is especially important if you are living alone.
- If provider staff have **immediate concerns about your well-being**, authorized provider staff may conduct a wellness check at your unit.
- If another resident notifies provider staff of a concern about you and staff are unable to contact you, authorized provider staff may attempt to contact you to ensure that you are safe and well.
- If provider staff have had **no contact with you for three (3) days in a row/reasonable amount of time**, provider staff may try to locate you/ask other provider staff members if they have seen you or heard from you. If they still cannot locate you then they may do an Emergency Safety Check at your unit.

Why We Do It

Emergency Safety Checks save lives! They alert us to immediate medical needs.

How We Do It

If provider staff members have had **no contact with you for three (3) days in a row/reasonable amount of time or have concerns about your immediate safety:**

- Authorized Staff member(s) will knock on your door and/or ring your bell.
- They will announce themselves to let you know why they are there.
- If you are home, just respond. That lets the staff know you are okay.
- If authorized staff get no response after several tries, Property Management may enter your unit for an Emergency Safety Check.
- As they enter, they will again announce their presence.
- If you are in your unit, let the staff know if you are okay or if you need any assistance.
- If they find you in need of emergency assistance, they will contact the appropriate help.

How You Can Help

Conducting Emergency Safety Checks is part of the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing's Policies & Procedures and these checks apply to <u>all</u> residents. However, you can prevent unnecessary Checks by doing any of the following:

- Stay in contact with provider staff members.
- Let a provider staff member know ways to get a hold of you.
- Let any provider staff member know if you will be away from the building for an extended period.

Resident: By signing this form, I am verifying that I have reviewed and received this Emergency Safety Check Policy Notice.

_____

Resident Signature Date

Name of the staff member who reviewed this document with the resident. If resident refuses to sign the Notice or if attempts to outreach to resident to compete form have failed, note that on the Resident Signature line.

Staff Name	_____	Date: _____/_____/_____
Agency		

This is a policy of the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH).

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Appendix B:
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can we perform an Emergency Safety Check if the client is in their unit, with the door locked and they are asking for help? Upon outreaches of at-risk residents, we often get them calling from the inside to "open the door". It is difficult to assess what level of emergency it is through the door. Would it be appropriate for Property Management to key into the resident's room if they are inside requesting for us to use a key to enter?**

   If the resident is asking for staff to enter, it should be assumed that this constitutes as both consent and a potential emergency.

2. **What should building staff do if Property Management is not on site?**

   Authorized property staff should follow the practices/policies and procedures of the PM provider regarding entrance to a unit in an emergency situation. In anticipated emergency situations where no key is available, and there is reasonable evidence of an emergency, emergency responders (i.e. law enforcement, fire department) have broken down doors.

3. **Does this policy apply to scattered site units?**

   The HSH Emergency Safety Check Policy is not intended for scattered sites. HSH expects scattered site providers to check in on their residents to the best of their ability.

4. **Can a liability waiver be included in the policy and the client's notice?**

   Information about California Civil Code 1954 is included in the policy. Organizations are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel if they would like to include any liability clauses in the lease agreements or house rules.